

ICPS newsletter®

Is political will alone enough for irreversible democratic transformations?

ICPS director Vira Nanivska thinks that political will alone could prove not to be enough for irreversible democratic transformations. The Government needs to properly organize itself to carry out this will—and to organize ideological support for the general public. Yet this will be impossible to accomplish without the capacity, both in the Government and the society, for systematic public analysis of state policy—without, in short, a permanent social discourse on government policy. A key role in this democratic effort can be played by non-government think-tanks

Prior to Viktor Yushchenko, elections did nothing more than switch around the people in power, without altering the system of state administration. That is why all the people who had access to information about his goals supported Mr. Yushchenko. He promised to put an end to corruption, to make government transparent, to make government officials accountable, and to ensure every citizen democratic rights and freedoms. Mr. Yushchenko ostensibly promised to institute radical reforms in the hopelessly ineffective and corrupted leftover soviet system of public governance.

So what do we have today? Are our expectations for all-encompassing, irreversible democratic transformations being fulfilled? What does this depend on? Will they ever be fulfilled?

Unthinkable concepts, undivided leadership

The country's new political leadership is doing things that were once unthinkable: it is talking about the real problems of real life and is genuinely concerned about truly national state interests. With this behavior, the country's new political leaders are destroying the sacred law of the totalitarian, closed soviet system of governing, where real interests, real competition, real decisions were always hidden behind closed doors. Instead, all public declarations about interests and the problems of the nation and the country were inevitably pure fiction, mere camouflage.

The country's new top leadership is undivided, and for this reason, it is exceptionally effective at the political level in those areas that were part of the

election platform: eliminating corruption and integrating into Europe. Today's foreign policy is frankly inspiring: Ukraine is transforming from a complete zero to a strong player on the world stage before our very eyes. All the anti-corruption talk inspires trust and an uplifting feeling. "Can this possibly be happening?"

De-sovietization without reinforcement

Unfortunately, the brilliant success of the democratic behavior of Ukraine's current political elite and its persuasive public de-sovietization are not supported by any evidence of success—or at least of some understandable intentions—in terms of organization. So far, there is no evidence at all of a capacity for organizational or administrative (bureaucratic) transformation of the government machine, that is, its functional de-sovietization. This incapacity of the Government to organize itself in terms of carrying out the serious reform of de-sovietization could result in the collapse of the revolutionary wave of democratization.

If truth be told, the soviet government machine was the ideal administrative and bureaucratic tool to carry out a top-down system of government. Political competition happened only behind closed doors. The winners always represented the same interest group, while their rivals were always declared enemies of the people and destroyed. There was no question of any public political competition. Moreover, decisions could be initiated only at the top of the heap and the implementation of such decisions happened by fiat from the top, down the entire chain of command.

Professional and experienced as they were, soviet bureaucrats could not even imagine the kind of dissidence inherent in the concepts of "analysis of possible consequences of political decisions" or "impact assessment of political decisions."

Not only words, but deeds

Today's political leadership swears entirely by its own political will and expects its word to be enough to reach the goals written into the president's and Government's programs. In just one example, the Minister of Health recently wrote a letter to oblast administrations, either exhorting them or commanding them to "ensure free access to medical services," to "change the status of local general practitioners to that of family doctors," and to "report in 10 days on the results."

Without any doubt, this kind of soviet behavior on the part of current Cabinet members rouses fear of what lies further, not only for democracy but for Ukraine as a whole. How on earth can we expect the campaign promises to be fulfilled when there is an impression that the Government simply does not understand the immense chasm between what is said at the highest political level and what is actually done at the bureaucratic level?

Moreover, decisions are not institutional, that is, they are not grounded in any analysis of the roots of problems or of possible consequences, they are not coordinated with the actions of other ministries, especially the Ministry of Finance, they do not anticipate any obstacles, and they are not supported by any real resources.

Lifting yourself by your own bootstraps?

The de-sovietization of the government bureaucracy—what does this mean?

First of all, public documents, programs and plans must stop being mere formalized ideological smokescreens and be developed as real, effective political instruments that can ensure that politicians understand fully

their accountability for the consequences of any decisions that they make. Strategy needs to present a precise picture of the relationship between goals and resources or obstacles—not an encyclopedia of dreams of happiness.

Secondly, the new bureaucracy needs to analyze all interests that are affected by any proposed policy, including business interests and real political interests in the struggle for power. Without this kind of analysis, there is no chance for the Government to effectively plan actions that will inevitably rouse opposition and to formulate arguments to counter it.

Thirdly, a new system of approving and implementing decisions needs to be established in order for the government to be both transparent and accountable. Top-down orders worked poorly, sometimes not at all, even under Leonid Kuchma. Today, when competition has become totally legitimized, fundamentally new approaches and skills need to be developed. In the first place, policy analysis, policy coordination and change management are urgently needed now. The Ukrainian Government's problem is not bureaucrats but the structures, processes, standards and habits that formed the old bureaucratic system. The bureaucrat cannot by nature be a revolutionary. Only Baron Munchausen was able to raise himself up by his own bootstraps. The rules of the game, duties, norms, and requirements need to change—and only then will it be evident who is a good bureaucrat, and who a bad one.

Fourthly, the new Government needs new administrative capacities in order to ensure meaningful political discourse. It needs to turn to its citizens not only as political personalities on television, but in public documents that raise vital issues in state policy and allow voters to understand why the Government intends to institute a particular change, which problems it considers an absolute priority, and which steps it intends to take to resolve them. The use of Green and White Papers to establish two-way communication between the Government and its citizens and ensure conscious support of its policies on the part of voters is common in developed democracies such as the European Union and many other countries.

The real thing or yet another facsimile?

Can these urgent changes take place? What will happen if they don't? These changes

could take place for two reasons. Firstly, there has been a good deal of technical assistance in the years since Ukraine became independent and many government people were able to learn from it—even though change did not happen for lack of political will. Secondly, the essence of radical administrative reform, of de-sovietization, lies in the simple act of stopping the mindless activity of generating ideological smokescreens and instead injecting some basic common sense into the activities of the government machine. This is possible because the country's highest political leadership is already doing this at its own level—with great success.

The risk is that yet another soviet facsimile of publicness is being created: the new community councils and collegia that are "about everything" resemble nothing so much as the public soviet reports once provided by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They lack structure, both in relation to government policy, and in relation to interest groups or stakeholders. Members of the Government are physically unable to cope with the endless stream of ideas, topics, recommendations and critiques that accumulate at such gatherings.

The risk lies not in that the Government will place the task before itself to be transparent and public, but that it will abandon itself through inertia to the momentum of the existing machine and resort to hand management instead. Without clear, straightforward, meaningful documents about its policies, the Government will look ever more unsystematic, it will be less and less able to speak with one voice, and it will become more and more necessary for it to issue policy documents in a format that is not available for public scrutiny. Voters will find themselves gradually becoming disillusioned and frustrated because it will become impossible for them to understand or predict the actions of their government.

This risk is enormous also because most representatives of the winning team have understood the victory of the Orange Revolution not as a victory for democracy, but as a victory of specific individuals who happened to work in *Nasha Ukraina* during the presidential campaign. Many of these people are not even thinking about any kind of new, democratic behavior on the part of the current Administration. For them, power is power, as it always was—

what else is there? And what were they fighting for, anyway? Will the winning team be capable of sacrificing the comfortable, protective traditional prerogatives of power for the sake of a complete transformation of the system?

Confident optimism

Today, there are independent think-tanks that analyze both public policy and the commitment of the new government. How can this invaluable resource be tapped fully on behalf of irreversible democracy in Ukraine?

The readiness of the new government to act publicly needs to be transformed into a bureaucratic process of consultation with interest groups and stakeholders that is mandatory for all government bodies with regard to those kinds of internal government documents that require analysis of the impact of proposed decisions, predictions of the response of affected interest groups, and propositions for Government action.

This orientation towards results rather than the mindless monopoly on noisy inaction will make the efforts of non-government organizations both wanted and needed. It is precisely think-tanks that are capable of transforming the shiny public presence of the government on television screens into a meaningful public dialog. Those who have taken the lead, who have great resources and whose ideas are far-reaching are especially important. It is critical that the powerful Razumkov Center, for instance, not be swallowed up by the Defense Ministry. The Yalta European Seminar organized by Viktor Pinchuk raised great hopes and it would be an enormous loss if Mr. Pinchuk's behavior during the election killed any further social contribution of his.

History is harsh. Every epoch requires completely different actions and different talents. For Ukraine, it would be a tragic mistake to sacrifice the future out of gratitude to the past.

In Ukraine today there are already many winners in the struggle for survival among policy centers. Together with the government and the opposition, we need to establish a winning social discourse around strategic issues in the country's state policy.

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